

WEEK 2 >>>

# WHAT GIVES US THE RIGHT TO CHANGE THE WORLD?

 **WATCH:** How does God use people to change the world? – Celia Apeagyei-Collins

Handling authority is a crucial aspect of leadership, and it is part of our created design. God holds the ultimate authority and He shares His authority with us. In an often overlooked section of the passion narrative when Pilate is boasting of his power over Jesus to crucify or free him, Jesus turns this around again and says: “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.” This doesn’t just apply to those in prominent positions, God shares his authority with all of us.

We don’t have a complete picture of how to handle authority from Jesus’ teachings and it would be asking too much to try and read one into this interchange. The same idea is, however, echoed in Matthew 22, Luke 20 and more fully in Romans 13 and the message becomes clearer: we have a God who has authority which we do not deny, but we live in a place with worldly authorities under whom we continue to live.

1 John 5:4-5 tells us that “everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God”. Understanding the authority of God which we sit under, and the authority which He has trusted us with, enables us to confidently step out into leadership in public.

In Romans 16:23, Paul sends greetings from “Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works.” From the very start, Christians were at the centre of local administration. As well as caring for the life of the church and caring for the poor, early Christians were giving attention to the life of their city.

So we get to join in. Join in with taking on responsibility; join in exercising authority; join in as leaders – as people with influence and power. And this can scare us. As Lord Acton wrote in 1887: “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.” But as Uncle Ben said to Peter Parker in *Spiderman* “With great power comes great responsibility.”

It’s not enough to simply ‘be part of the movement’. We can’t leave it to others to make the big decisions, and simply trail along in their wake. When William Wilberforce and the Clapham Sect began their anti-slavery campaign, they were standing against the most powerful trading companies in the world, and some of the most powerful politicians in Britain. Wilberforce agreed to lead the parliamentary campaign to end slavery in 1787, but the Slave Trade Act wasn’t passed until 1807, and the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833.

At the start of this journey, William Pitt told Wilberforce: “Do not lose time, or the ground will be occupied by another.” But who knows how many more thousands might have entered slavery, and died from it, before that other person appeared. And, if we leave it to someone else to lead, there is always the danger that we may not like where – or how - they lead us. For anything to change, leadership is essential. We can’t wait for someone else to do it. We need to shape the conversation. We see this throughout history as leaders have responded – sometimes in a seemingly unreasonable manner – to the need for change.

 **READ & REFLECT ON SCRIPTURE**

**READ: ROMANS 13:1-7 AND LUKE 20:20-26** What does it mean to submit to governing authorities? Are there people who might oppose you in your journey of public leadership? How can you stay strong and faithful in the face of disagreement, disapproval, and even hostility? Why can’t we simply follow where others might lead?

**READ: 1 CORINTHIANS 3** What are the challenges to handling power and authority and how can we learn to handle these well? How do we avoid becoming arrogant and thinking we are doing it in our own power?

**READ: ESTHER 4** What were the major challenges faced by Esther? Esther was called “for such a time as this”, but Mordecai warned her that “if you don’t step up, someone else will”. How does her story call us to step into leadership, but also remind us that it is God, not us, who is in control?

## DISCUSS

Sometimes, it might be necessary to stand in opposition to those in authority. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is famous not just for his theology, but for how that theology informed his dissent in Nazi Germany.

- What are the limits to authority?
- When should we resist it, and when should we stop exercising it? Think about when and how it is necessary to stand against authority.
- How can it be done effectively, respectfully and forcefully? Think also about examples where Christians have failed to stand against authority when needed, or where they have opposed authority badly.

## PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

Find out who your local MP, MSP, AM, MLA, county and town councillors, and other representatives are at [writetothem.com](http://writetothem.com). Also, [theyworkforyou.com](http://theyworkforyou.com) and [publicwhip.org.uk](http://publicwhip.org.uk) will help you to understand their voting record on issues that matter to you and investigate their speeches and other activities.

What can you do to support your political representatives in the face of hostility? If there is an issue on which you disagree with them, how can you respectfully but passionately take leadership and make your disagreement known without creating unnecessary conflict? Think about what kind of event or activity you could invite them to; perhaps you could ask them to share about their work and offer to pray for them.

## LISTEN TO GOD

Take some time out in silence and solitude to listen to what God has to say to you. If you're struggling to hear Him, try saying this short prayer:

*Lord, thank you for the gifts that you have given me. Help me to work not in my own power and for my own benefit but under your authority, to advance your kingdom. Give me an attitude of humble passion and godly ambition. But provide me also with the strength and determination to stand against earthly authority when it is necessary.*

*Amen.*

## TAKEAWAY CHALLENGE

This week, identify places where you could exercise godly authority: where are you called to stand in - or against - authority? What campaigns could you make a difference in, or what community activity could you volunteer for? You may wish to repeat the prayer above and spend time listening for God's answer – both in the stillness of quiet times, and in the voices of those around you.

## LEARN MORE

For links to these articles, go to [thepublicleader.com/ctw2](http://thepublicleader.com/ctw2)

*The Reluctant Leader*, David Brookes, September 2014, New York Times

*A season of preparation: Getting ready for all God has for you*, Joyce Meyer, December 2014, Christian Post

*The long and winding road to leadership*, Danny Webster, March 2017

*Facing opposition from your own side*, Abi Jarvis, November 2016